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Standing tall in Congress

The people of western Massachusetts who sent Edward P. Boland to Congress ought to be proud. Boland stood tall yesterday for principle in American foreign policy, refusing to knuckle under to Administration pressure to authorize continued funding for the CIA's illegal war against Nicaragua.

The "covert" war was the last sticking point in the House-Senate conference committee, trying to reach agreement on a half-trillion-dollar continuing resolution for fiscal year 1985, so that congressmen can go home to campaign for re-election.

"We're not going to agree to the Senate position and strip out the restrictive language," Boland said. "We are not going to. And the Senate ought to understand that."

It was the same unflamboyant but tough position Boland has taken for nearly two years - since he came to the conclusion, as chairman of the House Intelligence Committee, that CIA operations against Nicaragua had passed the bounds of reason, decency and law.

Boland is a strong backer of the intelligence agencies when they confine their activities to intelligence-gathering. He also initially favored clandestine operations inside Nicaragua when they were portrayed as efforts to interdict "arms traffic" to El Salvador. But when it became evident that the contra mercenary army organized by CIA Director William Casey was really attempting to overthrow the government of a sovereign state, in contravention of international law and the US Constitution, he balked.

This produced the Boland amendment, which has passed the House four times but failed in the Senate. It is loophole-free language designed to bar the channeling of any funds through the CIA or any other government agency to continue the war.

The struggle resumes on Tuesday. Backed by Speaker O'Neill, the Massachusetts delegation and principled congressmen of both parties, Boland can be expected to continue to stand tall by standing fast.